

one team must emerge victorious, and Caliche proved themselves the best in their class—truly second to none.

The State 2A Championship is the highest achievement in high school basketball. This coveted trophy symbolizes more than just the team and its coach, Rocky Samber, as it also represents the staunch support of the players' families, fellow students, school personnel and the community. From now on, these people can point to the 1998–1999 boys basketball team with pride, and know they were part of a remarkable athletic endeavor. Indeed, visitors to this town and school will see a sign proclaiming the Boys State 2A Championship, and know something special had taken place there.

The Caliche basketball squad is a testament to the old adage that the team wins games, not individuals. The combined talents of these players coalesced into a dynamic and dominant basketball force. Each team member also deserves to be proud of his own role. These individuals are the kind of people who lead by example and serve as role-models. With the increasing popularity of sports among young people, local athletes are heroes to the youth in their home towns. I admire the discipline and dedication these high schoolers have shown in successfully pursuing their dream.

The memories of this storied year will last a lifetime. I encourage all involved, but especially the Caliche players, to build on this experience by dreaming bigger dreams and achieving greater successes. I offer my best wishes to this team as they move forward from their State 2A Championship to future endeavors.

ENCOURAGING MEXICAN GOVERNMENT TO RELEASE DRUG TRAFFICKERS

HON. RON PACKARD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 23, 1999

Mr. PACKARD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to reiterate the commitment of my colleagues and I to win the war on drugs and encourage the Mexican government to cooperate with our efforts.

Recently a Mexican judge dismissed charges against two drug kingpins, Jesus and Luis Amezcua-Contreras. These brothers have both been indicated on narcotics charges by federal grand juries in separate cases in Southern California. Mexico has claimed for years now to be allies of the United States in the war against drugs, but the fact of the matter is that the Mexican government has yet to extradite a national drug kingpin for trial in the United States to date.

Mr. Speaker the fact is that United States drug laws are stricter than those in Mexico and drug criminals fear our judicial system. We must send a message to our neighbors to the south and these criminals that we will not be intimidated or weak willed when dealing with this serious issue.

It is vitally important for the United States to continue to stand firm in our commitment to win the war on drugs. Without the full co-

operation of our neighbors, we have little chance of meeting this goal. The United States, and southern California in particular, cannot afford yielding in our efforts to stop the flow of illegal drugs over our borders and into the hands of our children.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage the Mexican government to release drug traffickers which have been indicted by our government back to United States officials so they can be properly tried in our country. We must protect our children from such diabolic criminals.

TRIBUTE TO MARY HARRIS EVANS

HON. ANNA G. ESHOO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 23, 1999

Ms. ESHOO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Mary Harris Evans, an extraordinary citizen of San Mateo County, California, who will be inducted into the San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame on Friday, March 26, 1999.

Mary Harris Evans has a rich and varied background as a professional and a volunteer. While attending California College of Podiatric Medicine, Mary founded an outreach program at Laguna Honda Hospital and treated senior citizens in their homes at no charge. Mary is now a Financial Advisor and Retirement Specialist with Dean Witter, where she assists clients with the management of their portfolios. Throughout her career, Mary has always made a great commitment to volunteerism, most notably fifteen years service to the California 4-H.

Mary also serves as President of the American Baptist Women of the West and helped found the African-American Community Health Advisory Committee. Mary is also a trained mediator and was recently instrumental in helping Mrs. Tom Lantos put together a Homeless Theater Project.

Mr. Speaker, Mary Harris Evans is an outstanding woman and I salute her for her remarkable contributions and commitment to our community. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring her on being inducted into the San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame.

THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS NURSE APPRECIATION ACT OF 1999

HON. STEVEN C. LATOURETTE

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 23, 1999

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Speaker, imagine if the Congress singled out a mostly female workforce of 39,000 federal employees and, under suspension, passed legislation that:

allowed the workers to go up to 5 years in a row without a single raise;

allowed them to have their pay cut by as much as 8% in a single year;

or provided for an annual increase as minuscule as one-tenth of one percent.

Now imagine that a president not only signed this measure into law, but that it's been

the law of the land for nearly a decade. Which group of federal workers has suffered this unthinkable injustice? None other than the 39,000 nurses who work for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and have devoted their careers to caring for our Nation's ailing veterans.

In the 101st Congress, the House and Senate passed the Nurse Pay Act, well-intended legislation that was designed to ease a national nursing shortage by allowing VA medical center directors to forgo the annual general schedule (GS) pay schedule that applies to virtually all federal employees. In theory, this new law enabled directors to give nurses higher annual raises than other federal workers so they could recruit and retain a quality workforce. Unfortunately, as soon as the national nurse shortage eased, the intent of the law was manipulated and directors started using their discretion to deny raises, provide tiny raises, and even reduce pay rates.

Today, I introduced the VA Nurse Appreciation Act of 1999, legislation that will rectify the pay injustice VA nurses have suffered. This legislation will ensure that Title 38 VA nurses receive the annual GS increase plus locality pay so they will be on equal footing with other federal workers in their area. It will also give the VA Secretary the discretion to increase pay, or delegate this authority to directors, if they have trouble recruiting or retaining quality nurses.

In the last few years some congressional attention has been focused on the VA nurse problem, and the VA has quietly "encouraged" directors to give raises. Still, VA nurses have fared far worse than other federal workers. Overall, the average annual increase for VA nurses was 50% lower than the standard GS increase in 1996; 60% lower in 1997; 25% lower in 1998; and about 17% lower in 1999.

Furthermore, abuse from the Nurse Pay Act is widespread and knows no geographic boundaries. From 1996–1999, nurses at 16 different VA medical centers had their pay rates reduced by as much as 8% while other federal workers received annual GS increases ranging from 2.4% to 3.6%. In addition, from 1996–1999, NO raises were given to Grade I, II or III nurses (statistically 98% of the VA nurse workforce) at about 80 VA medical centers around the country. Worse still, some nurses go several years without raises, such as in Long Beach, CA, where VA nurses received no raises in 1996, 1997, 1998 or 1999. At other centers, meanwhile, nurses have received embarrassingly low annual increases—often 1% or lower.

Mr. Speaker, the Nurse Pay Act deserves credit for ending a nursing shortage and making salaries competitive. For example, in its first year nurse pay increased by at least 20% at 82% of all VA medical centers. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned measure's locality-based pay system eventually ended up punishing many of the 39,000 VA nurses.

Our VA nurses deserve praise for standing by our Nation's veterans. Many could have sought higher paying jobs in the private sector, jobs that offer annual increases and signing bonuses. Instead, most have chosen to stay with the VA because they care deeply for our ailing veterans and enjoy a sense of reward and patriotism from their specialized